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Denial, Clarification in Korea Scandal

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A South Korean embassy spokesman yesterday labeled as false any implication that a former ambassador cabled Seoul that he was distributing cash to U.S. congressmen.

"I can state categorically that there are no cables to support such allegations and that all the allegations are therefore false," the spokesman, Sudoc Kim, said.

At the same time, Rep. Bruce Caputo (R-N.Y.) tried to clarify his Thursday remarks that House investigators have incriminating South Korean diplomatic cables that were intercepted and decoded by U.S. intelligence.

Caputo, a member of the House Committee on Standards of Official

Conduct, said he knows investigators have cables but he has not personally seen any cables from the South Korean embassy or Seoul.

He also said he was speculating when he told reporters that the cables were intercepted and decoded by the National Security Agency.

Caputo said the point he was trying to make was that he believes committee investigators have enough information to justify investigating "a pattern of suspicious involvement" of eight or more current House members with former ambassador Kim Dong Jo.

"I should have been more careful about some of the other things I said leading up to that point," Caputo said in an interview.

The former ambassador has been accused of trying to give congressmen envelopes stuffed with \$100 bills, but Caputo refused to say if investigators have direct evidence that Kim gave cash to the eight congressmen.

Two years ago, congressional investigations of U.S. intelligence activities disclosed that NSA has intercepted embassy cables of allies as well as unfriendly governments.

The investigations also disclosed that NSA had gathered other types of intelligence, including commercial cables, so that its information cannot be presumed to be diplomatic cables.

"I don't know how we got the information, but I know it includes information gathered by the NSA," Caputo said.

MORI/CDF